

Research Brief

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Did compromise voucher law achieve intended purpose?

In early 2006, Governor Doyle signed Act 125 into law, codifying the legislative compromise that allowed the cap on enrollment in Milwaukee's Parental Choice Program (MPCP) to be increased in exchange for greater accountability for the participating schools.

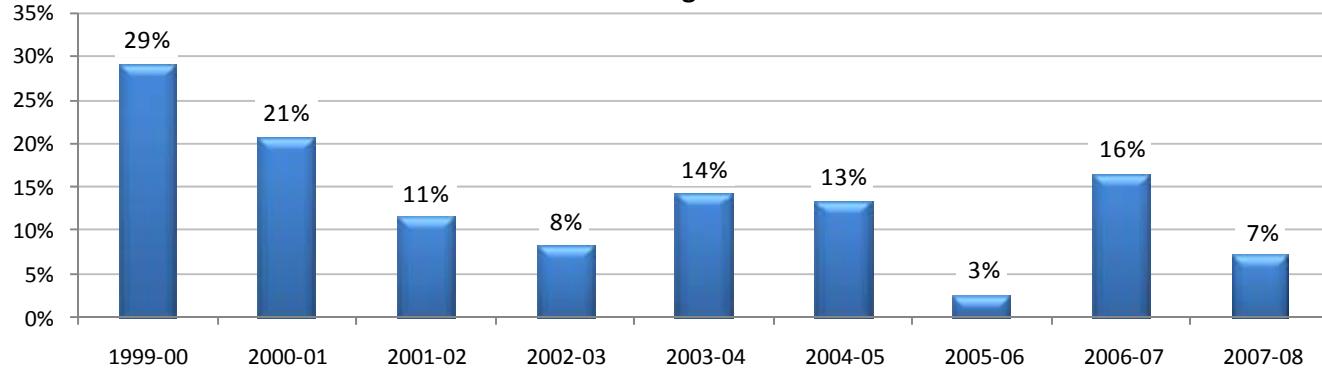
After the cap was increased to 22,500 voucher students last school year, voucher use increased 16% to 17,951 students, the largest growth in the program since the 2000-01 school year. One year later, voucher enrollment increased only 7%, the second smallest increase since 1999-00. Voucher enrollment is now 19,233 students in 123 schools.

Act 125 also removed the requirement that voucher users be former public school students. Thus, a majority of the enrollment increase in 2006-07, almost 60%, was due to previously ineligible private school students now using vouchers. This year, 44% of the growth in voucher users can be attributed to previously enrolled private school students.

Thus, again this year, many new voucher users were likely already private school students. Coupled with the small overall growth, this trend indicates that demand may be on the wane for vouchers as an option out of public schools, despite the higher enrollment cap. The moderate growth in enrollment is not due to lack of space in the private schools: the schools had predicted voucher enrollment of over 27,800 this year.

Act 125's accountability measure similarly may have failed to meet legislative intent. Although voucher schools must now be accredited, the statute allows schools to choose non-traditional accrediting agencies that do not have the arm's length relationship with the schools that would normally characterize the accreditation process. As a result, 42% of voucher students attend schools accredited by atypical accrediting agencies.

Chart 1: Percent change in MPCP enrollment



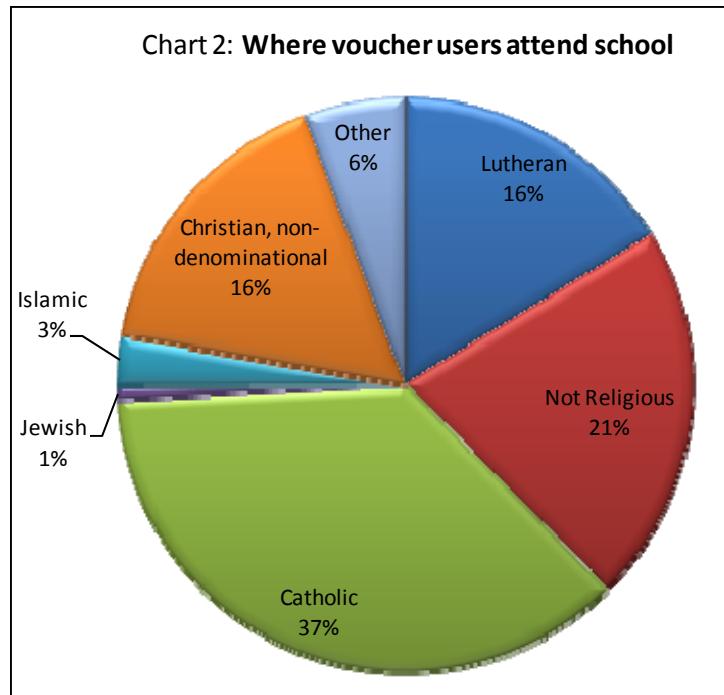
Key findings

- There are 10 new voucher schools, with a total voucher enrollment of 399 students. Meanwhile, 11 schools have left the program since last year. These schools had enrolled 621 voucher students.
- Voucher growth outpaced total enrollment growth—1,282 new voucher users compared to total enrollment growth of 720 students.
- Fourteen accrediting agencies work with the schools. The Wisconsin Religious and Independent Schools Accreditation (WRISA) accredits the greatest number of schools (40). The Archdiocese of Milwaukee and Marquette University's Institute for the Transformation of Learning accredit 18 schools each.
- Twenty-eight of the 38 schools that enroll 100% minority students have teaching staffs that are more than 75% minority, while five have staffs that are more than 75% white.
- Vouchers are used in Kindergarten at a rate equal to one student for every three MPS kindergarteners. In high school, the rate drops to less than one voucher user for every five MPS students.
- In the aggregate, high school voucher users appear to drop out at a lower rate than do MPS high school students.

Religious schools

Of the 120 schools participating in our census this year, 20% report they are non-sectarian. Of the 96 religious schools, 32 are Catholic, 27 are non-denominational, and 27 are Lutheran. Overall, there are nine religions represented by voucher schools.

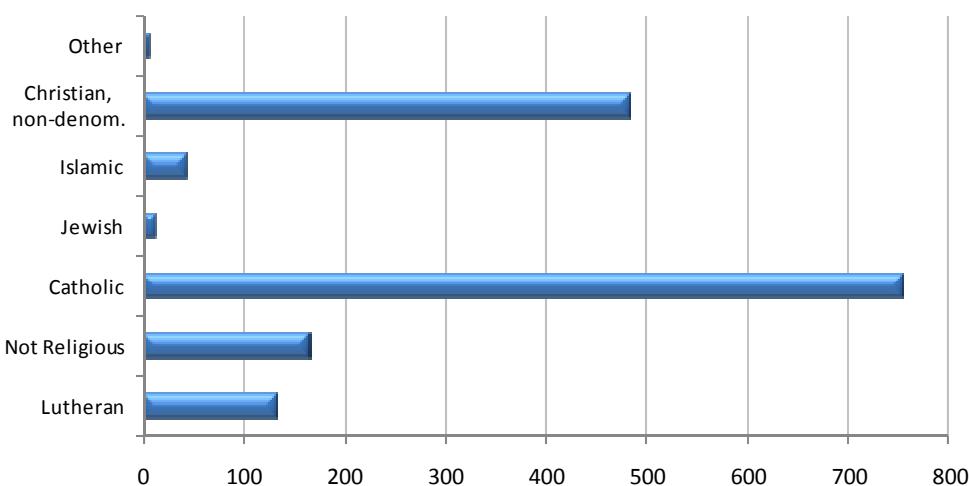
Catholic schools enroll about 37% of all voucher users, same as last year. Twenty-one percent of voucher students attend a non-religious school, slightly more than last year. The



largest growth in “market share” was in non-denominational Christian schools, with 16% of voucher users - three percentage points more than last year. Lutheran schools saw their share of voucher enrollment decline to 16% from 18% last year.

The average MPCP school has 157 voucher users in 2007-2008. Non-religious schools have more voucher students on average, with 167 students per school, while religious schools average 154 voucher students per school. The two Islamic schools have the highest average number of voucher students at 267. Catholic schools have the second highest average at 215.

Non-denominational schools had the largest percentage growth among religious schools in voucher enrollment, 19%. Growth in Catholic school voucher enrollment was next highest at 12%; Lutheran schools at 5%. These growth rates are very different from last year, when the cap was lifted. Last year, when the cap was lifted, non-denominational schools declined in voucher enrollment; voucher use in Lutheran schools, however, grew 18%.

Chart 3: Enrollment change by religion, 2006-07 to 2007-08

Table 1: Change in voucher users 2006-07 to 2007-08, top ten and bottom ten schools

	Years in MPCP	Change in voucher users	Change in payment
Greater Holy Temple Christian Academy	5	138	\$897,138
Agape Center of Academic Excellence, Inc.*	12	119	\$773,619
Destiny High School	2	98	\$637,098
Atlas Preparatory Academy, Inc.	7	79	\$513,579
Prince of Peace	10	58	\$377,058
Urban Day School	18	57	\$370,557
New Testament Christian Academy	2	51	\$331,551
Carter's Christian Academy	4	48	\$312,048
Northwest Lutheran School	2	47	\$305,547
St. John Kanty School	10	47	\$305,547
Hope Middle School	3	-18	-\$117,018
Early View Academy of Excellence	10	-19	-\$123,519
Believers in Christ Christian Academy	10	-20	-\$130,020
Travis Technology High School	2	-21	-\$136,521
Pius XI High School	10	-30	-\$195,030
Hope Christian School	6	-30	-\$195,030
Blyden Delany Academy	10	-50	-\$325,050
Trinity Christian Academy for Nonviolence	2	-56	-\$364,056
Blessed Savior Catholic School	**	-89	-\$578,589
Harambee Community School	18	-113	-\$734,613

Bold indicates was in top-10 last year

* indicates was in the bottom-10 last year

** Blessed Savior is a merger between Corpus Christi, Our Lady of Sorrows, St. Philip Neri Catholic School, and Mary Queen of Martyrs

Voucher use

Voucher users equal 71% of the total enrollment of 26,606 students in MPCP schools. Non-denominational Christian schools have the highest percentage of students using vouchers at 88%. Among non-religious schools, 82% of the students use vouchers, while in the Catholic and Lutheran schools, 59% and 69% of the students use vouchers, respectively.

Seventy-five of 113 schools that have participated in the program for the past two years experienced an increase in their voucher enrollment.

Greater Holy Temple Christian Academy had the largest increase between 2006-07 and 2007-08, at 138 students, representing an increase of \$897,138 in voucher payments. Three schools have been in the top-10 in growth both years: Greater Holy Temple Christian Academy, Atlas Preparatory Academy, and Urban Day School. Harambee Community School lost the most voucher students this year, 113 students, after having been a top-10 school last year in growth.

MPCP vs. MPS enrollment

The total number of voucher users equates to 22% of Milwaukee Public School (MPS) enrollment in 2007-08. However, in the lower grades, voucher users can equal as much as 30% of MPS enrollment. Voucher students in five-year-old

Table 2: MPCP vs. MPS enrollment by grade

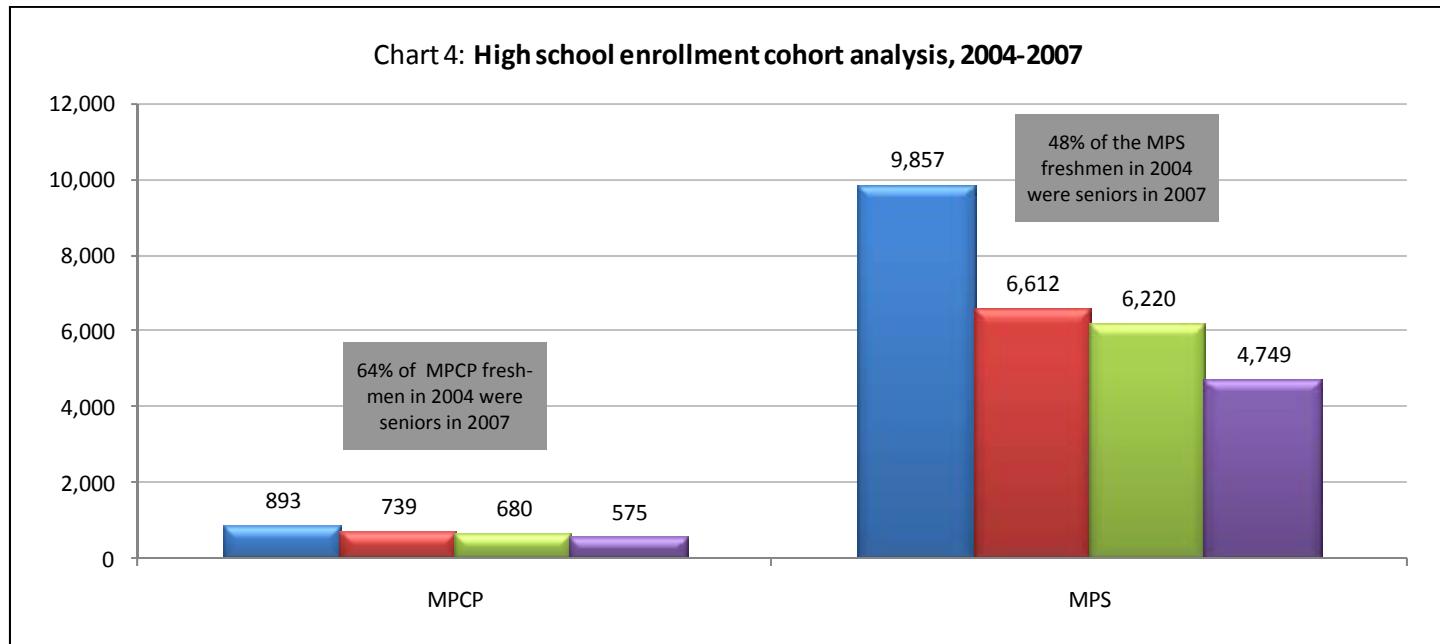
	MPS enrollment	MPCP enrollment	MPCP as % of MPS
K3	1,619	0	
K4	5,613	1,576	28.1%
K5	6,204	1,856	29.9%
1st	6,328	1,815	28.7%
2nd	6,191	1,713	27.7%
3rd	6,193	1,586	25.6%
4th	6,087	1,508	24.8%
5th	5,700	1,452	25.5%
6th	5,653	1,511	26.7%
7th	5,861	1,414	24.1%
8th	6,147	1,369	22.3%
9th	8,950	1,125	12.6%
10th	6,039	1,007	16.7%
11th	6,026	726	12.0%
12th	4,749	575	12.1%
TOTAL	87,360	19,233	22.0%

Kindergarten have the highest ratio, with one voucher user for every three MPS Kindergartners. In seven grade levels, voucher use equals more than one for every four MPS students. Under the new higher voucher enrollment cap statute, voucher users are capped at 22,500, which would equate to almost 26% of MPS's total enrollment. There are five grade levels in MPCP that currently enroll voucher students at levels greater than 26% of the corresponding MPS enrollment: K4 through 2nd and 6th grades.

In the high school grades, voucher usage in comparison to MPS enrollment falls sharply. A cohort analysis of aggregate enrollment in the voucher program and MPS over the past four years indicates that voucher users maintain their high school enrollment at a higher rate. Among voucher users, the 2004 freshman class equates to 64% of senior enrollment this year. In MPS, freshman enrollment in 2004 equates to 48% of senior class enrollment this year.

The largest difference between voucher users and MPS students is in the 10th grade. In MPS, there is a dramatic drop from 9th grade to 10th

Chart 4: High school enrollment cohort analysis, 2004-2007



grade enrollment the next year; 10th grade enrollment equates to 67% of 9th grade enrollment. For voucher users, 10th grade enrollment equates to 83% of the prior year's 9th grade enrollment. One factor is the high 9th grade retention rate in MPS. About 30% of MPS 9th graders are repeating the grade.

Predicted vs. actual enrollment

In February 2007, schools were required to report their predicted voucher enrollment for the 2007-08 school year (27,838 students). If this enrollment prediction had proved accurate, voucher enrollment would have been over the statutory cap. The actual 2007-08 voucher enrollment is 19,233, or 8,605 students less than predicted. Four schools predicted fewer voucher users than their eventual voucher enrollment and three schools made accurate predictions. Twenty-six schools made predictions of more than 100 students over their actual voucher enrollment in 2007-08. Urban Day School and Atlas Preparatory School—both among the top-10 schools in growth—predicted 462 and 450 more students than their actual enrollment, respectively.

Schools also were required to predict the number of returning voucher users and new voucher users. Fifty schools in the program predicted they would have more new voucher students than returning students. Urban Day School predicted 281 more new voucher students than returning students, the most of any school.

Minority teachers

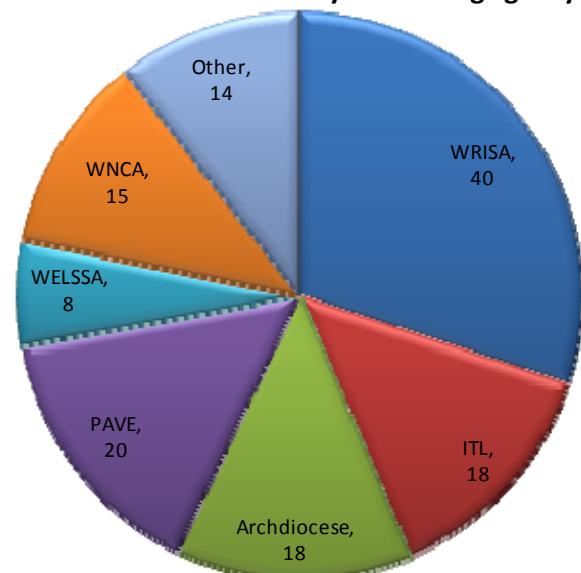
For the first time this year, schools were asked to report the racial distribution of their teaching staff, in addition to that of their enrollment. One hundred schools reported both, of which 38 schools reported 100% minority enrollment. Of these 38 schools, 16 reported 100% minority teaching staffs and another 12 reported teaching staffs comprised of more than 75% minority teachers. Twenty-one schools reported 100% minority teaching staffs.

Of the 38 schools reporting 100% minority student enrollment, two reported a 100% white teaching staff; another three reported teaching staffs more than 75% white. Twenty-six schools reported 100% white teaching staffs.

Accreditation

Voucher schools now are required to be accredited after three years in the choice program. Accreditation establishes the academic, governance and other standards a school meets and is conferred by an accrediting agency. There are 14 different accrediting agencies working with voucher schools. Of the 120 schools responding to our census, 40 (representing 37% of voucher enrollment) reported accreditation through WRISA, the most popular accrediting agency in the program. Twenty schools are accredited by Partners Advancing Values in Education (PAVE), while the Archdiocese of Milwaukee and Marquette University's Institute for the Transformation of Learning each accredit 18 schools. These three agencies together represent 42% of voucher enrollment. Sixteen schools reported being accredited by more than one agency.

Chart 5: Voucher schools by accrediting agency



*16 schools reported being accredited by more than one agency.

Conclusion

Recent changes in the voucher program's enabling legislation were intended to increase the program's ability to enroll dissatisfied public school students while ensuring some third-party accountability for voucher schools. After changes in eligibility requirements and the lifting of the enrollment cap last year, enrollment did grow, but much of this growth came from existing private school students. Again this year, more than two-fifths of new voucher users were already private school students. Furthermore, this year's growth in voucher enrollment was only 7%, the second lowest increase since 1999-2000. These trends seem to indicate that demand for vouchers as an option for public school students has increased at a more moderate rate than in the past.

When demand is analyzed by grade level, we find that the early grades are the most popular; voucher enrollment compared to MPS enrollment at each grade level - K4 through 2nd - exceeds the overall rate imposed by the statutory cap. The ratio of voucher use to MPS enrollment drops as the grade levels increase, indicating that parents of older students may not seek alternatives to public school with the same frequency as parents of children beginning their schooling careers.

Other statutory changes now require schools in the voucher program to be accredited by an approved accrediting agency. Accreditation is perceived as a rigorous process conferring some independent oversight and accountability, which would ideally help parents make decisions about quality when choosing among various schools. However, because the state legislature allowed many non-traditional accrediting agencies to be on the approved list, whether true accountability and guidance for parents exists is debatable. Twenty schools in the program are not required to implement independent accreditation because they formerly enrolled students receiving scholarships from PAVE, a pro-voucher advocacy group. Other agencies doing much of the accrediting (the Archdiocese and the Institute for Transformation of Learning) are not the type of detached, independent organizations typically associated with accreditation, as private schools have been affiliated with these agencies for many years prior to their becoming accrediting bodies. The 56 schools accredited by these three agencies enroll 42% of all voucher students, meaning many students are not benefiting from independent standards.

In sum, many voucher schools are not seeking independent accreditation and the outside accountability it brings, while public school parents demonstrate a slowing demand for private school options. Both trends cast doubt on whether the twin goals of the legislative reform - greater growth and greater accountability - will be achieved.

For a poster-sized directory of all private schools participating in the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program,
visit our website
www.publicpolicyforum.org.